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HOMEMAKERS' CHAT

Friday, June 30, 1941

(FOR BROADCAST USE ONLY)

Subject: "HOW TO BUY SHEETS." Information from the Bureau of Home Economics, U. S. Department of Agriculture.

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It's June, the month of roses and green leaves--of wedding presents and shower gifts. And for many of the new homes, practical friends will buy sheets.

So today, I'm going to talk about buying sheets and about judging their quality. The pointers are just as good for campers getting their equipment together or for homemakers buying new sheets to take the place of old worn out ones. So here goes--the information comes from the U. S. Department of Agriculture.

To judge the type of sheet to buy, according to Miss Ruth O'Brien, textile specialist of the Department, first decide what kind of service it's going to get. That is, do you want a sheet that will stand the rough and tumble of a growing child's bed? Or do you want finer, softer sheets--more of a luxury article? There's the first point to settle. Next, study labels. Read and compare facts to find the sheet that measures up best for the money you have to spend.

In general, sheets fall into one of five groups--the light, medium, heavy-weight muslins, the fine counts, and the percales. Each serves a definite purpose. For example, a heavy muslin sheet is strong, sturdy, durable. It's the best for hard wear. And on the other hand, the fineness and softness of percale makes it a better choice when appearance counts and cost is not so important.

But it pays to look carefully at any sheet sold as percale nowadays, suggests Miss O'Brien. If used correctly the word on a sheet label, she says, means one of combed rather than carded cotton yarns. The finished sheet is very soft, fine, and smooth in texture. It weights around 3.7 ounces to the square yard, and the thread count is close to 100 in each set of yarns. That is, in both the warp and the

filling. These good quality percale sheets gained so good a reputation for beauty that some manufacturers are now mis-using the word. They use the name to sell sheets made merely of carded yarns and with much lower thread count. This often fools customers.

Compare sheets by the type of their yarns, whether combed for percale or carded for the others. Compare them, too, for thread count, weight, amount of sizing, breaking strength and length and width. Good labels will give these facts and will also tell whether the sheet is a "first," "second" or "run of the mill."

The amount of sizing in sheets varies from less than 1 percent to 20 or 25 percent in some of the low grades. Some sizing on warp yarns is necessary to prevent breaking in the loom. Then, too, a little sizing makes the fabric more attractive and does no harm. However, large amounts are frequently used to fill up space in poorly woven material. Such sizing washes out and leaves the fabric sleazy and thin. The term, "pure finish" on a label tells you there is less than 2 percent sizing in the sheet.

Width of hems on sheets varies. It may be less than 2 inches or more than 4 inches. The higher quality often have the wider hems, but the two do not always go together. The length of the sheet as given on the label is the length before hemming. Sometimes a wide hem cuts down too much on the length of the finished sheet.

Then there's the size of the sheet to consider. Any sheet ought to be wide enough to allow a generous tuck in all the way around. Also it must be long enough for a good fold-over at the head of the bed. This makes for more comfortable sleeping, and also protects the blankets.

Generally, sheets 99 to 108 inches long are the best. Some are now 112 inches. Bargain sheets are often too short and sometimes too narrow. Often sheets shrink as much as five to eight inches, and they are rarely preshrunk. In fact, it would be foolish to preshrink them under present commercial conditions. But just remember

that they will shrink, and buy them long enough to take care of it.

Look for the term, "torn length" on labels. This means that the material has been torn from the bolt before hemming. Cut length may be straight, but it is just as likely to be bias. If the end isn't straight with the weave, the sheet will likely be lop-sided after it is washed.

All in all, there are many points to consider when judging sheet quality. The final selection always narrows down to the needs of the particular homemaker. Not long ago a homemaker wrote the Bureau of Home Economics asking advice on which of two types of sheets to buy. One of the sheets she was considering was of heavy muslin, the other of percale. From the homemaker's description of the sheets--the thread count, the breaking strength, the amount of sizing, and other facts learned from the labels--the specialists of the Bureau knew that both sheets were of good quality, and both were attractively priced. They could tell the homemaker that much. They could tell her that likely the muslin sheet would wear the longer and stand the harder wear--that the percale sheet was probably the more attractive. It would certainly dress up the guest room. But beyond that, it is really up to the homemaker to decide which kind of sheet best fits her needs and her pocketbook.

It it's a case of comparing sheets of the same type, then always choose the one with the more yarn counts per inch, the higher breaking strength, and the least sizing. And, now in winding up my talk for today, may I remind you that we're lucky here in the United States to have so many kinds of sheets to choose from. With our great superabundance of American-grown cotton, we have the widest selection of sheets to choose from in the whole world at present.

